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EGYPTIAN ELECTION

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THE DUST HAS SETTLED IN THE WAKE OF EGYPT'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND ALTHOUGH THE OVERALL RESULTS PRODUCED FEW SURPRISES, VOA'S DOUG ROBERTS IN CAIRO SAYS MOST OBSERVERS THERE BELIEVE THE ELECTION WAS HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT.

VOICE:

SHORTLY AFTER THE NINETEEN FIFTY-TWO REVOLUTION THAT ENDED THE EGYPTIAN MONARCHY, POLITICAL PARTIES WERE BANNED, DESCRIBED BY THE YOUNG REPUBLIC'S MILITARY RULERS AS CORRUPT -- A SENTIMENT APPARENTLY SHARED BY MANY EGYPTIANS AT THE TIME. UNDER PRESIDENT NASSER, THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION EMERGED AS EGYPT'S SOLE POLITICAL PARTY AND IT REMAINS SO TODAY.

BUT DURING THE JUST-CONCLUDED ELECTION CAMPAIGN, THREE DISTINCT POLITICAL GROUPS, AS WELL AS INDEPENDENTS WITHIN THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION, GAVE EGYPTIAN VOTERS THEIR FIRST REAL TASTE OF POLITICAL CHOICE SINCE THE REVOLUTION. MORE THAN SIXTEEN HUNDRED CANDIDATES VIED FOR THE THREE HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHT SEATS UP FOR ELECTION IN THE ASSEMBLY, AND ALTHOUGH VOTER TURNOUT WAS NOT PARTICULARLY HIGH, ENTHUSIASM FOR THE CAMPAIGN IMPRESSED EVEN THE MOST CYNICAL OBSERVERS.

AS EXPECTED, THE CENTRIST FORUMS, LED BY PREMIER MAHMOUD SALEM, WON AN OVERWHELMING EIGHTY-ONE PERCENT MAJORITY OF THE ASSEMBLY SEATS, AND THE PREMIER IS CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF FORMING A NEW CABINET. INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES FINISHED SECOND IN THE OVERALL BALLOTING GARNERING FORTY-EIGHT ASSEMBLY SEATS. THE RIGHT WING FORUM WON TWELVE SEATS WHILE THE LEFTIST GROUP MANAGED TO GAIN ONLY TWO.

THE CENTRISTS ARE THE STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES. BUT AS THE ELECTIONS PROVED, GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS WERE BY NO MEANS GUARANTEED A VICTORY. SEVERAL PROMINENT FIGURES IN THE PARTY, INCLUDING THE FORMER HEAD OF THE PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, FAILED TO RETAIN THEIR SEATS. TWO FORMER DEPUTY PREMIERS, A FORMER GOVERNMENT MINISTER, THE HEAD OF THE HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL AND PRESIDENT SADAT'S BROTHER IN LAW ALSO WERE DEFEATED IN THE VOTING. IN FACT, LESS THAN HALF THE INCUMBENT LEGISLATORS WILL BE PRESENT WHEN THE NEW ASSEMBLY OPENS ITS FIVE YEAR TERM ON THURSDAY.

THE CAMPAIGN WAS COLORFUL, HEATED AND, AT TIMES, VIOLENT. THERE WERE SEVERAL SHOOTING INCIDENTS AND THREE PERSONS WERE KILLED IN ONE DISTRICT WHEN POLICE WERE FORCED TO OPEN FIRE ON AN ANGRY MOB OF STONE THROWING DEMONSTRATORS APPARENTLY PROTESTING THE OUTCOME OF LOCAL BALLOTING.

MANY FOREIGN DIPLOMATS WERE CLOSELY FOLLOWED THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THEY ARE NOW ATTEMPTING TO ANALYZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINAL RESULTS. ONE DIPLOMATIC SOURCE SAID THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE CAMPAIGN WAS THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE GENUINELY FAIR AND HONEST IN MOST CASES. SOME OBSERVERS HERE SEE THE ELECTION AS A LOGICAL OUTGROWTH OF THE CAMPAIGN OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION LAUNCHED BY PRESIDENT SADAT FIVE YEARS AGO. OTHERS, INCLUDING MANY PROMINENT EGYPTIANS, BELIEVE THAT THE EMERGENCE OF FULL-FLEDGED POLITICAL PARTIES HERE IS NOW ONLY A MATTER OF TIME. WHAT, IF ANY, NEW POWER THE ASSEMBLY WILL GAIN REMAINS TO BE SEEN. BUT IT DOES SEEM CLEAR THAT EGYPTIANS CAN EXPECT SOME LIVELY DEBATES AND EXPRESSIONS OF WIDELY DIFFERING VIEWS WHEN THE NEW ASSEMBLY GOES INTO SESSION.

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